

IT'S WHAT'S AHEAD THAT COUNTS

By

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It is an honor for me to be with you at this annual meeting of Universal Cooperatives. United, National have been and now Universal is an important part of my every day.

These are challenging times for our cooperatives but these are also times that offer greater opportunities than the founders of United and National could have really believed possible. Yes, I know that many of our pioneers were leaders with great vision and imagination. However, I have doubts that they really believed that a purchasing, manufacturing and merchandising cooperative of the magnitude of Universal

*Presented by Dr. Charles H. Ingraham, Extension Economist, Business Management, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, at the Annual Meeting of Universal Cooperatives, Ramada O'Hare Inn, Des Plaines, Illinois, November 16, 1976.

Cooperatives was a real possibility. This is really an age of consumerism and Universal is an outstanding example of the results of a logical consumer effort well-planned and carried out.

Each of the thirty-eight owners of this dynamic cooperative can and should take pride in their collective accomplishments. But we must be alert not to use our tremendous accomplishments as a hitching post but instead use our current situation as a launching pad to blast off into the future to better serve our farmer and consumer members.

I would prefer to entertain you as you are relaxed here this afternoon, many of you after your productive committee work, but in these times of challenge and opportunity, Universal must continue to be the creator of change and an inspiring leader. I hope my remarks disturb you but I want you to understand I'm on your side.

To me, cooperatives are a tool that farmers and consumers can use to improve their economic situation. Our competitive economy requires that our tools be modern to be effective and this is true of our cooperative. To be productive, these tools must be used to their maximum efficiency. Universal must continue to lead the way with new ideas and services.

As cooperative leaders, we cannot follow the old, well-worn smooth paths but we must as cooperative leaders before us, strike out into new uncharted areas. The going will be rough at times, as it has been in the past. Some ventures will not be productive, and we will need to help each other over the rough spots as we have in the past. A real tribute to the agricultural and consumer cooperatives throughout the history of National, United and Universal is their working together despite their variance in size and membership and geographical differences.

Today it is popular to be against the large and successful but it's time we took a more positive approach.

At an AMPI meeting in Kansas City this past summer, I heard a young man by the name of Charlie Plumb who was a POW for six years in Viet Nam speak. Mr. Plumb told his audience that the first thing he learned from his fellow POW's was that if he wanted to survive, he must have three things --- faith, pride and commitment. To me this philosophy applies to us in our cooperatives. We need faith in ourselves and faith in our fellow co-op members, faith in our cooperative and our country. We need pride. Pride in ourselves, pride in our fellow cooperative members and pride in our cooperative. We need commitment to our

purpose, and to our cooperative, and commitment to each other. I believe that we cannot afford in our current economic climate to have our cooperative just standing by in case we want to use it. The history of cooperatives contains the obituaries of too many cooperative ventures that farmers and consumers were not committed to and used only when they couldn't take their business elsewhere. We need to do a better job of teaching that it's the net that counts.

I find in the history of United States agriculture and cooperatives that we have continually experienced difficulty in the transfer of leadership. I like to think that today we have developed our cooperatives to a degree of maturity that dynamic imaginative, cooperative leaders are abundant. You, the cooperative leaders of today, have put together a tremendous organization --- Universal --- and the challenge is can we stand to be different to be leaders and move ahead? I think we can, but only by having the basic philosophy, 'What's best for our members rather than what's best for me.'

I was reading a management textbook this weekend and the author writing about cooperation in the work force made the point that cooperation is spelled WE. That is, I think, a good point --- WE can do it!

It is a terrific challenge for thirty-eight cooperatives from such a wide geographical area and diverse situation to come together as you have in this cooperative. For the past forty years, many people have said you couldn't do it, but you are doing it. You are doing it because you and those before you had faith, pride and commitment.

I want to point out the difficult circumstances under which many who went before you found themselves in. About 1937, give or take a couple of years, United Cooperatives came up with a plan to market soybean oil by using it to make paint. My father painted our home, barn and buildings with this Unico Soybean oil paint. My grandfather painted his home, barn and buildings with the old tried and true paint from the hardware store. Of course, everyone for miles around knew about this. You see, my grandfather didn't think too highly of these cooperatives. I am confident that all across the country there were people with faith in the college engineering committee and the leadership of United, their commitment was demonstrated as their neighbors like ours said it will all wash off or it's no better than whitewash, and I'm sure that these cooperative leaders with faith, pride and commitment like my family watched that paint and were proud of our cooperative as it out lasted the tried and true linseed oil paint.

You and I face these same challenges today. The question is do we have the faith, pride and commitment necessary. I think we do! There are always differences of opinion in any group as to how best to get a job done. What pulls people together into a team is a common purpose. I like to think that our common purpose is what's best for our individual farmer and consumer members.

One thing that works against bringing a group into a team is if some members of the group are determined to get ahead at any cost. Just as is the case of a football player who believes he is a big enough star that he can do it alone. His independent attitude may not only bring defeat for himself but for his group.

Some think that loyalty is a thing of the past and that loyalty to a group or a cooperative is not as automatic as it once was and there is some truth to that. As our cooperatives have grown in size and complexity, they unfortunately become more impersonal and members sometimes feel lost in the shuffle. This, then, is but another challenge you and I must accept. We can be loyal ourselves, to our cooperative, and to our fellow members. I have heard managers of local cooperatives complain about their members not using their cooperative when at the same time, these same managers, and, yes, boards of directors approving are not using

the services of the regional and the regionals may not be using the services or products of interregionals that they have invested the members' money in. Why, too often the decision is based on what's best for me rather than what's best for the members.

There are three types of people --- creators of change, reactors to change, and resisters to change. The same is true of cooperatives. We must not be content to program our own survival but to program the advancement of the team.

The future of Universal and cooperatives is in the minds, hearts and hands of you.